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ABSTRACT

The United States fulfilled its desire to be the country that reopened trade with Japan through the Kanagawa Treaty (1854). Japan reluctantly rejoined the world community at a time when their culture and economy were in disorder. While grappling with the changes within their borders they tried to keep the ways of the "barbarians" from tainting their homeland. A highly developed economic structure had evolved during 250 years of domestic peace from under the policies of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1601-1867). In the early years of this government, it was felt that one of the most serious dangers was the European Catholic missionaries and their converts. To reduce the numbers of missionaries, foreign trade was limited to the Chinese and Protestant Dutch after 1638. In the end, the Japanese were forced to accommodate the changing realities of a world where technology made seclusion impossible to seclude themselves. Commodore Matthew C. Perry's report on the Kanagawa treaty concluded that the "introduction of foreign habits" would open up a consumer market of 30 million people. (BZ)

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The Sons Of Heaven

Confront The Barbarians

Japanese - American Trade 1797 - 1860

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Workshop for Teaching About Japan
August 15, 1986

To:

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"Japanese differ from and are superior to the peoples of China, India . . . . and all other countries of the world" because Japan is 'the homeland of the gods.' "

Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) *1

"Our hearts beat for an oppressed world. Our object is the greatest good of all men. We believe that our Government is best calculated to make men happy, . . . What hinders, we ask, a Government like this from extending over the world and making it politically happy?"

The New York Times 1850 *2

In 1854 Commodore Matthew C. Perry reopened Japan to commerce with the world. Exchange between the two countries began on rather a rocky road, though. The quotes above represent common attitudes in the two countries at that time. The Japanese and Americans were both proud peoples who had very different ideas about how their world should work. The situation guaranteed that establishing trade would be a long, difficult process. Japan reluctantly rejoined the world community, but when the "Sons Of Heaven" signed the Kanagawa Treaty with America, their culture and economy were in disorder. While grappling with the changes within their borders they tried to keep the ways of the "barbarians" from tainting their homeland. Their previous contacts with the West made them wary of further contact.

Japan had been trading with China and other Oriental countries since the sixth century A.D. Europeans discovered Japan in 1543 when Portugese traders reached the southern island of Kyushu. They, and the other European countries that quickly joined them, sent missionaries along with trade goods. The

Tokugawa Shogunate reunified the country in 1601 after 200 years of civil war, and the new Japanese leaderschose to eradicate all possible sources of challenge to their rule. They felt one of the most serious dangers was the European Catholic missionaries and their converts. The missionaries were expelled and Christians were persecuted to extinction. After 1638, foreign trade, the source of the missionaries, was limited to contact only with the Chinese and Protestant Dutch, and only through the port of Nagasaki.

With the reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1601 - 1867) Japan's culture, politics, and economy evolved during 250 years of domestic peace. The country had a feudal society reinforced by the Confucian precepts of chu (loyalty), ko (filial piety), jin (charity) and rei (heirarchic distinction). The social order was based on inherited position, the Emperor and his court uppermost, followed on the social scale by the Shogun and Daimyo (lords), samurai, farmers, artisans and lastly the merchants. The government was decentralized, each lord controlling his han (domain). The Shogun financed and staffed the Bakufu, the governing bureaucracy, with his own revenues and retainers. A rice tax on all farmers provided the money to run the government. Each han had a smaller version of the Bakufu to oversee its affairs, independently run by the daimyo.

The policies that the Tokugawa shoguns intended to control the country politically generated a highly developed economic structure in Japan. One of the most influencial policies was that of sankin-kotai, alternate attendance of the daimyo in the

capital of Edo. Each daimyo had to keep his family and a required number of samurai in Edo, effectively, as hostages. During alternate years he had to reside in his domain. The yearly travel and the costs of living in Edo created a tremendous drain on the revenue of the daimyo and samurai - effectively reducing their ability to challenge the Shogun. Seven national highways with over 8,000 inns and restaurants developed to serve the needs of the travelers. A postal system aided communication between Edo and the domains.

By the 18th century Edo had a population of 1 million people, half of them samurai whose daily spending made the city one of the world's greatest consumer markets. *3 The money spent came from over 200 domains and ways had to be found to transfer the resources of the provinces to the capital, preferably in cash. Also, Edo had to be supplied with food, clothing, etc. beyond the capacity of the surrounding countryside. A wholesale market developed in Osaka where domain surpluses were sold and banks transferred credits to Edo. Merchants became specialized by 1700, providing transportation, warehousing, retailing and finance for the daimyos' trade.

T. G. Tsukahira estimated that 80% of the available cash revenue of the domains was spent on the expenses of sankin-kotai, *4 a boon to the merchants and innkeepers in Edo and along the route. Along with the cost of repairing damage from the frequent typhoons, earthquakes and fires, sankin-kotai was a significant reason why the daimyo and their retainers were deep in debt by the 1800's. A contemporary writer in 1840 noted that the estimated national total of domain debts required the sale of

three-quarters of the rice that was shipped annually to the Osaka market from all areas just to pay the service charges. He commented that the daimyo had become little more than stewards to the great financiers, who were the "real"owners of Japan. *5

The daimyo required that his samurai retainers live in his castle town, as a means of control and also to enable them to fulfill their bureaucratic duties more effieciently. The 200 castle towns drew artisans and merchants, becoming the centers of commerce for their regions. The demands of Edo and the townspeople brought about great changes in rural life. Farmers began raising commercial crops, such as wax for candles, cotton, silk, and indigo. Certain forms of manufacture also grew: sake brewing, spinning and weaving grew into cottage industries well before the end of the Tokugawa period.

However, many farmers failed because they could not cope with the fluctuations in prices or they were not able to increase their productivity. They fell into debt and eventually became tenants or common laborers. By 1827 Sato Nobuhiro claimed that 30 - 40% of the farmers had lost their land this way. *6 Also in two centuries considerable areas of new land were brought under cultivation, not necessarily by those with land already. These profits along with those from local trade and manufacture, created "gono," rich farmers, who lived well and educated their sons. Many even bought their way into the samurai class.

There is evidence that the average land tax in the late Tokugawa period was 35-45%. *7 This was raised when natural disasters drained the domains revenues. The farmers were further

required to provide labor for public works - road repair, irrigation and labor for the yearly journey to and from Edo. There were 400 incidents of revolts or unrest between 1813 and 1868. *8 The protests were against high rice prices, misadministration, rising land taxes or the monopolies set up by the shogun or domain (an important source of new revenue). The new rich imposed additional burdens of rent, usury and commercial profits to feudal dues.

Bankrupt daimyo, impoverished samurai and heavily taxed farmers were the reasons for "naiyu," troubles at home, that challenged the Bakufu in 1853. "Naiyu" increased the pressures on the administrators as they confronted with the unignorable demand for trade from the West. The Japanese called it "gaikan," dangers from abroad.

During Japan's self-imposed seclusion, a door to the West was kept open through its yearly trade with China and Holland. Each year the Dutch were required to travel to Edo and report to the Shogun on the political conditions, industry and trading patterns of the outside world. Scholars began to specialize in "rangaku," Dutch studies. They published works on Western medicine, technology, military science, language, astronomy, clocks, and the application of science to warfare and the nature of society. *9 Their works were circulated among a small group of scholars, officials and lords, but were influential in Tokugawa politics.

The Japanese were aware of the threats from the West. Russia had attempted to take over the northern islands in the late 1700's. Britain had been trying to open trade with Japan

since 1808, but their efforts in China occupied their energies. In 1844, the Dutch king warned Japan to take steps to end its seculsion voluntarily before it was forced from the outside. He cited the Opium War in China as an example of the consequences if Japan did not comply. The debate in the Bakufu on what to do about these threats was heated, but inconclusive. Aizawa Seishisai, an influential writer of the late Tokugawa period, stated the prevalent ideas:

> "When those barbarians plan to subdue a country not their own, they start by opening commerce and watch for signs of weakness. If an opportunity is presented, they will preach their alien religion to captivate the people's heart." Shinron, 1825 *10

America's contacts with Japan were indirect at first. From 1797 until 1809 American ships were chartered by the Dutch to conduct the yearly trade between Japan and Holland. *11 This was necessary because of the war between France and Britain; France controlled Holland and thus Dutch ships were in danger of attack from Britain.

In 1801 the American ship, "Margaret," arrived in Nagasaki with a cargo typical of Dutch commerce for almost 200 years: sugar, spices, sapanwood, sandalwood, rattans, glassware, cloth, medicines and a provisions for the small Dutch settlement in Nagasaki. They brought back tea caddies, knife boxes, tables, and the like of lacqueware, porcelains and housebrooms. Other export items were copper and camphor.

George Cleveland, captain's mate on the "Margaret," recorded the reactions of some of the first Americans to deal with Japan. He wrote of the intricate trading procedures at Nagasaki:

> "Captain Derby, Mr. West and myself carried several articles of merchandise on our own account. This has always been allowed to Dutch captains, but the sale of these articles must be made by the Japanese government." (The articles were taken to a warehouse for display, examination and sale. They had brought tumblers and wineglasses among their goods. "No one in this country (U.S.) . . can have an idea of the trouble we had in delivering (the merchandise), which would not have been an hour's work in Salem." *12

Further American contact with Japan was not established until the 1830's. American commerce was expanding, with whalers and clipper ships frequenting the Northern Pacific and China trade routes. More and more sailors were being shipwrecked in Japan and bringing back tales of imprisonment and brutality. The same fierce storms in the Japan Current that wrecked American ships, also set Japanese sailors adrift. Many were rescued up by the whalers. In 1836 C.W. King, an American merchant, chartered the "Morrison" to return seven of the castaways. The ship was fired upon at the two ports it entered and left with its mission uncompleted. In 1846 two armed ships of the U.S. Navy were ordered to Japan to arrange some kind of understanding between the U.S. and Japan. The Japanese refused to negotiate. *13

With the introduction of steamships on the trading routes, America felt it could no longer tolerate Japan's refusal to negotiate. In 1852 the United States authorized an official mission to Japan led by Commodore Perry to ensure the protection of shipwrecked American sailors, gain access to Japanese ports for provisions and coal (Britain was pre-empting supplies around

the world) and seek the rights of trade, if only on a temporary basis. Commodore Perry arrived in Edo Bay in July, 1853 with four armed warships to present a letter from President Fillmore to the Emperor. The U.S. was determined to impress the Japanese not only with its military power but also its economic strength:

> "The United States of America reach from ocean to ocean, and our territory of Oregon and state of California lie directly opposite to the dominions of your Imperial Majesty. Our steamships can go from California to Japan in eighteen days.
>
> "Our great state of California produces about sixty millions of dollars in gold, every year, besides silver, quicksilver, precious stones and other valuable articles."
>
> "We have directed Commodore Perry to beg your Imperial Majesty's acceptance of a few presents. They are of no great value in themselves, but some of them may serve as specimens of the articles manufactured in the United States, and they are intended as tokens of our sincere and respectful friendship."
>
> Excerpts from President Fillmore's letter to the Emperor *14

Perry left three weeks later with the understanding that he would return the following Spring for an answer. Copies of Fillmore's letter were sent to all the daimyo by Abe Masahiro, Senior Member of the Bakufu. This was an unprecedented step, the first time the daimyo had been consulted in 700 years. Abe felt the proposal would raise anti-Bakufu feelings if it were accepted without discussion. He also felt that most lords would demur to his opinion that hostilities were to be avoided. He was wrong. There was no majority opinion and each faction was led by men he couldn't ignore:

> "To exchange our valuable articles like gold, silver, copper and iron for useless foreign goods like woolens and satins is to incur great loss while acquiring not the smallest benefit."
>
> Tokugawa Nariaki *15

"The profits from trade are greater than the profits to be made from seizing (another country's) land and increasing agricultural production . . . If we now want to pursue a policy of 'enriching the country and strengthening the army,' there can be no better way of doing so than by establishing trade."

Mukoyama Gendayu *16

"Now, the desire of gain is common to all men, and is the pregnant womb of all evil. Confucius seldom spoke of gain, wishing to check the lust of it in its source. This, also is the reason why my ancestors cut off all intercourse of foreign nations with Japan, because the desire of gain led astray the ignorant, til filial duty, modesty, and the sense of shame were all forgotten."

A Japanese official assigned to Perry *17

The debate was still raging when Commodore Perry arrived in February, 1984 to negotiate an agreement. He returned with the President's gifts and eight warships and found Japan's coastal defenses almost non-existant. The people of Edo depended on the shipping that supplied them with food, but Edo Bay could be easily blockaded by the American ships. The government lacked money to fortify the area. Thus the Bakufu ordered its representatives to negotiate with Perry. They held talks over the next weeks, but a conversation recorded by the Japanese shows how far apart Japanese and American ideas were:

Commodore Perry: "Why do you not allow commerce? Commerce has to do with the things which a nation has and with what it lacks; it is a source of great profit and now flourishes between the countries of the world night and day. It brings great wealth to each country. If you open your country to commerce it will bring you great profit and will surely be to your advantage."

Lord Rector: "However much commerce has to do with what a nation has or lacks and would therefore be to its advantage, our country since the beginning has found the things which it produces to be sufficient for its own needs. We are not discontented at being without the products of other countries. . . You say that your principal purpose in coming was to have greater value

> have attained your purpose. Now, commerce has to do with profits, but has it anything to do with human life? Is it not enough that you have gained what you sought?" *18

In the end, the Japanese were forced to bow to the changing realities of a world where technology made it impossible to seclude themselves. On March 31, 1854 the treaty was signed - providing for the protection of castaways, provision of ships' stores and coal at the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate, and allowance for a consular representative to be stationed at Shimoda in 18 months. Perry's report on the Kanagawa treaty concluded:

> "The Japanese are, undoubtedly, like the Chinese, a very imitative, adaptive and compliant people, and in these characteristics may be discovered a promise of the comparatively easy introduction of foreign customs and habits, if not of the nobler principles and better life of higher civilization."
>
> Commodore Matthew C. Perry *19

The "introduction of foreign habits" would open up, Americans hoped, a consumer market of 30 million people. The gifts that the Americans brought to Kanagawa indicated the kind of the goods that they intended to offer for trade. The gifts to the Emperor were products that exemplified advanced technology and industrial strength: a one-quarter size locomotive, carriages and tracks, two sets of telegraph equipment, clocks, a sheet iron stove, printing press, and agricultural instruments. The Japanese were impressed by the demonstrations of each. Gifts were also presented to the negotiators: books on history, geography, architecture, geology and a dictionary. The Japanese gifts to America were brocades and silks, lacquerware tables, trys and cups, porcelains, fans, pipe cases and articles of

apparel. Perry received 2 complete sets of Japanese coins, 3 matchlocks, and 2 swords.

American ships immediately began to use the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate. The Japanese hoped that America would delay assigning the consul for Shimoda, but Townsend Harris arrived two months early, in August, 1856. His duties were to protect America's commercial interests, ensure the welfare of her citizens and perform other administrative duties. He was also to attempt to negotiate a full commercial treaty with the government at Edo. Shimoda now provided ships' stores, but a bazaar had also been built especially for the foreigners. The physician on the ship that brought Harris describes it:

> "Indeed, every ordinary want and necessity was neatly and commodiously provided for by the Japanese. The whole was new and fresh . . . (The open-fronted shops around the courtyard were filled with lacquerware:) black and gold, gilded . . . in value from fifty cents to two hundred dollars . . . There was also a small collection of silks and porcelain."
> Dr. William Maxwell Wood *20

Though the government would spend the next year trying to avoid negotiation of a trade treaty, some Japanese were obviously ready to open commerce with the barbarians. Townsend Harris spent the time arranging for the exchange of currency, arguing for the right of permanent residence and the lifting of travel restrictions on the consul. Lord Hotta Masayoshi, now Senior Councillor of the Bakufu, consulted his officials:

> "The Bakufu having decided that, whatever the course we pursue, trade must be opened, it is my wish that you shall without a moment's delay complete an investigation of the main questions involved, such as how trade is to be handled, what goods are to be used in it, and at which ports it is to be conducted." *21

Even after almost two years of debate, there was no clear concensus of opinion among the lords of the Bakufu. Kawaji Toshiaki wrote the memo for the conservative faction:

> "Our Country is unparalled in the world in that it has both fertile soil and habits of simplicity. In this we differ from the foreigners, who love luxury though their lands are poor and barren. . . it is incumbent on the Bakufu to manifest its military strength by killing the men and destroying the ships of these cunning foreigners." *22

Kawaji did go on to say that the change in world conditions necessitated a policy of peace toward the foreigners, but he warned against the evils of pursuing profit, as it might cause the Japanese to become barbarians themselves. Iwase Tadanari was the author of the liberal faction's memo:

> (At the port to be opened to foreigner's trade) trade goods from the different provinces . . could be loaded there . . a suitable tax could be imposed. Similarily, foreign cargoes could be landed there . . and a suitable duty levied from the foreigners also. . . the volume of our exports would naturally increase. And as it did so, from taxes alone the Bakufu would derive enormous profit." *23

While the Bakufu could not agree on how to proceed in opening trade, they did permit Harris to travel to Edo and present President Buchanon's letter to the Shogun. Harris also had "other matters of importance" to discuss with the officials. In order to advance his case for a trade treaty with America, he warned the Japanese that the British would soon be coming. It would be better to negotiate now with the U. S., he said, than later with the British under the guns of warships. Harris had a number of opportunities to talk personally with the Senior Council, Lord Hotta, and as he reported, "engaged in teaching the

elements of political economy." *24 The lesson was not lost on Hotta who issued a memo on foreign policy within a few days:

> "I am therefore convinced that our policy should be to stake everything on the present opportunity, to conclude friendly alliances, to send ships to foreign countries everywhere and conduct trade, to copy foreigners where they are at their best and so repair our own shortcomings, to foster our national strength and complete our armaments, and so gradually subject the foreigners to our influence until in the end all countries of the world know the blessings of perfect tranquility and our hegemony is acknowledged throughout the globe." *25

This statement probably pushed the opening of trade a little farther than Harris desired. But it did open negotiations on a commercial treaty which were concluded in February, 1858. The signing of the treaty was delayed for the imperial signature, with the hope that it would silence all opponents. However, the Emperor, when consulted for the first time in hundreds of years, refused to sign. Anti-Bakufu opponents had gotten to court first and convinced the Emperor that trade was evil. Because of the failure, Lord Hotta was replaced by Ii Naosuke as Chief Councillor.

On July 23, 1853 the crisis of which Harris had warned finally developed. American warships arrived at Shimoda with news that peace was restored in China. The British and French were leaving at once to open negotiations with Japan. Harris rushed to Edo to inform officials. The Bakufu had made a secret agreement to sign the treaty, taking full responsibility, if a crisis arose. At a meeting of the council, officials with diplomatic experience agreed that the time had come. On July 29, 1858 Bakufu representatives signed the treaty. By October of

that year similar treaties were signed with Britain, Holland, Russia, and France.

The treaty was in many ways unfair to Japan, but it stood until the Japanese had gained more experience with world trade and realized how unequal its provisions were. The treaty provided for a minister to reside in Edo; the ports of Osaka, Kanagawa, Nagasaki, Niigata, and Hyogo would be opened to trade between July 4, 1859 and January 1, 1863,;customs duties were fixed at between 5 and 20% on most goods (liquor was taxed at 35%), and American citizens had extraterritoriality. There were provisions preventing the importation of opium. Resident foreigners could practice Christianity. *26

Traders immediately moved into Kanagawa, the first port opened.

In 1860 the Japanese sent an embassy to America to exchange ratifications of the treaty with the President. When the envoys arrived in the United States they were welcomed with a spectacular show of enthusiasm in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York City. Tens of thousands lined the parade routes to get a glimpse of the mysterious orientals. Newspapers were filled with stories of their activities, commenting on their curious habits and costumes. Like the Americans before them, they took the opportunity to purchase some souvenires. Though their govenrment had been reluctant to open trade, Japan's first tourists had no such reservations. From the journal of one of the envoys, Tamamushi Sadayu Yasushige:

> "Most officials are . . in the city trying to buy watches and woolen material and velvet, . . People are purchasing things by twos and threes, even by fours and

fives, so that they may sell them upon their return home. They dash around looking for the cheapest store. (but later on he writes) some connoisseurs are spending as much as one hundred or even two hundred dollars on one item." *27

However at the time of the 1860 embassy, trade was having immediate and destructive consequences in Japan. Because of Japan's peculiar gold-silver exchange rate, foreigners bought up gold in hugh quantities and sold it elsewhere for staggering profits. Foreign demand for Japanese goods far exceeded the supply, and the result was a rapid and steep rise in the prices of domestic commodities. *28 Townsend Harris reported that the price of rice skyrocketed 300%. *29 Imports threatened domestic industries. The Shogunate fought to obstruct and limit foreign trade, and found itself frustrated. The rude and greedy traders angered the Japanese in other ways, too, and their growing resentment soon took the form of a succession of murderous assaults on foreigners and their Japanese associates. The reactions to trade underscored the growing political gap between the Bakufu and a large part of the feudal class. By 1867 the Anti-Bakufu forces had toppled the Shogunate.

Members of the 1860 embassy had commented on the race problems in America. Soon the U.S. was embroiled in its Civil War and too preoccupied and exhausted to conduct trade with Japan. Its magnificent clipper ships were doomed by steam; its whalers, by the discovery of oil in Pennsylvania. *30 The Europeans, and especially the British, dominated trade with Japan for the next few decades. Nevertheless, after numerous confrontations and delays, America had fulfilled its desire to be the country that opened trade with Japan.

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Footnotes

1. Beasley p. 75
2. Statler p. 164
3. Beasley p. 42
4. Ibid. p. 47
5. Ibid. p. 51
6. Ibid. p. 56
7. Ibid. p. 49
8. Ibid. p. 57
9. Ibid. p. 79
10. Ibid. p. 74
11. Tamarin p. 22 - 28
12. Ibid. p. 26
13. Ibid. p. 35
14. Ibid. p. 236
15. Beasley p. 74
16. Beasley p. 94
17. Statler p. 103
18. Tamarin p. 143
19. Beasley p. 96
20. Statler p. 32
21. Ibid. p. 328
22. Ibid. p. 354
23. Ibid. p. 353
24. Beasley p. 107
25. Ibid. p. 107
26. Ibid. p. 108
27. Miyoshi p. 35
28. Ibid. p. 35
29. Statler p. 563
30. Ibid. p. 571